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Attached memorandum was prepared by
Mr. Houston as part of a package for
Senator Stennis.
Copies were given to Col. White and
Jack Maury on 4 August 1970.



4 August 1970

OGC SUBJECT ESPIONAGE

OGC Has Reviewed

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: U-2 Background

1. During the missile crisis of the early 1950s, classic intelligence collection efforts against the carefully guarded Soviet missile target were virtually useless. However, it had long been known that aerial photography of Russia would provide important information on such military targets.

2. After consulting all the experts, President Eisenhower directed the Director of Central Intelligence and the Secretary of the Air Force to collaborate in the secret development and procurement of a capability for overflight. Lockheed Corporation had already designed the basic concept of the U-2, which had been rejected by the Air Force as unsuitable for tactical intelligence needs. But, CIA believed it was the best available design for strategic overflights, primarily because of its unequalled altitude capability. The Air Force concurred.

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3. From the very first consideration of the U-2 program it was recognized that security was all important, as it was estimated that the Russians, with the equipment they then had, could not shoot down the U-2 at altitude but that if they knew that the U-2 was being built and what its capabilities were they could develop surface-to-air missiles which would be effective.

4. CIA believed that its procurement methods would assure a high degree of protection and when the Bureau of the Budget took the initial position that the building of airplanes should be done by the Air Force, senior representatives of the Air Force agreed that their procurement methods probably could not assure adequate security and CIA's procedures would give much greater assurance of such protection. CIA, therefore, undertook the development and planning of the entire program for procurement and operation of the U-2.

5. A letter of intent was given to Lockheed at the end of December 1954, and the first plane flew in August 1955. This unprecedented speed, resulting from intensive supervision of the program, was important from a security point of view as the sooner the plane was operational the less opportunity would be given to the Russians to develop countermeasures.

6. The first USSR overflight was in July 1956. For four years the U-2 covered the length and breadth of the USSR, bringing

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back photographic coverage of hundreds of thousands of square miles, including most of the strategic areas.

7. Due to the elaborate security precautions taken by CIA in the procurement, testing, and operational stages, it was many months before the first inkling of the U-2's existence appeared in the western press. During this time the Russians were aware that overflights were being made, but it took them a considerable period of time to ascertain what the capabilities of the machine were and what countermeasures would be needed. Indeed, there is still a question whether it was not more luck than improved equipment which brought about the shoot down of Gary Powers in 1960, thus ending the USSR overflights.

8. Without CIA's concentration on strategic intelligence programs, its know-how in secure procurement and operations, and its streamlined management procedures, it is probable that the U-2 operation would not have taken place and the United States would have been without one of the most successful intelligence operations in history at a very critical time.

9. Aside from the resolution of the missile problem, the U-2 program produced an over-all evaluation of USSR atomic capability during the period 1956-1960, accurate prediction of the 1956 Middle East war through photography of military preparations,

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and positive identification of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962.

These are but some of the most significant of the many, many contributions of the U-2 program.

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U-2 BACKGROUND

1. During 1954 the problem of defense against surprise missile attack by the Soviet Union occupied the attention of those people who bore the responsibility for the nation's security. Secrecy surrounding Soviet national defense efforts and Soviet hostility virtually negated classic intelligence collection efforts against the missile target. For many years it had been clear that aerial photography of Russia would provide direct knowledge of her growth, new centers of activity, and possible military targets.

2. In 1954 Dr. Edwin Land headed a Presidential Technological Capabilities Panel, Office of Defense Mobilization, which addressed itself to the lack of information relative to Soviet defense and missile capabilities and what measures the US could adopt to learn more about this. The Panel concluded that it would be desirable to institute an overflight program such as was offered in the U-2 proposal. This conclusion was later endorsed during 1954 when a special Study Group, under General Jimmy Doolittle, recommended the development of a high altitude photographic reconnaissance capability. On 24 November 1954 President Eisenhower agreed that there was a requirement for reconnaissance flights, and he directed the Director of Central Intelligence and the Secretary of the Air Force to collaborate in the secret development and procurement of a capability for overflight. To assure secrecy, information as to funds allocated for this purpose was carefully controlled. The first aircraft was delivered on 25 July 1955, with the first flight on 5 August 1955, less than nine months after the decision to proceed. The first U-2 operational mission took place on 20 June 1956 with an overflight of Poland, with the first USSR overflight on 4 July of that year.

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3. The entire U-2 program from 1956 to 1960 owes its success to a very great extent to the secrecy which surrounded it. Had the Soviets known that the aircraft was being developed, they could have started work on defensive equipment to shoot it down. They might also have tried to hide some of the more important military activities. Even after they were aware of the overflights, it took almost four years to acquire the capability to shoot the U-2 down. Secrecy as to the altitude capability and other details about the aircraft must have delayed the Soviets in their defensive efforts and may have accounted for up to two years of the four-year overflight effort.

4. In addition to the ability of CIA to conduct the development of the U-2 program in secrecy, there were several other factors which prompted the assignment of this program to CIA. First was the realization that there could be grave political repercussions to an overflight being shot down over enemy territory. Rather than have the effort interpreted as a military aggressive act (no statesman, as Land put it, could run the risk of provocation towards war) it was deemed appropriate that CIA, a civilian organization, undertake a covert program of selected flights. A second consideration was the streamline management technique which CIA procurement practices over and above those of the more elaborate military regulations. It was felt that CIA could offer a sole source procurement with far less repercussions and reviews than would be necessary in the DOD establishment. Further, normal DOD contractual reporting and documentation could be eliminated, therefore, reducing the cost.

5. Some important accomplishments by the U-2 aircraft were:

a. Overall strategic evaluation of USSR atomic capability during the period 1956-1960.

b. Prediction of the 1956 Middle East war. Based on U-2 photography, the time of the invasion was predicted very accurately indeed.

c. Positive identification of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962.

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